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The U.S. – Taiwan and the U.S. – Poland Non-Confrontational Asymmetry: A Comparative Analysis

Abstract

The article concerns the comparison of two cases of non-confrontational asymmetry in international relations: between Taiwan and the United States and between Poland and the United States. The author explores the differences and the common elements of both situations. The outcome provides a background for comparative studies concerning not only the international situation of Taipei and Warsaw, but also an introduction to comparative approaches concerning political developments in Eastern Europe and East Asia.

Keywords: Asymmetry, the United States, Taiwan, Poland, International Relations

Introduction

Assuming that an asymmetry means the lack of balance or uneven distribution, referring in particular to a situation when one element dominates other elements present in the analysed situation, in the context of international relations the term seems to have inherently negative connotations. Nowadays, the relations between the Russian Federation and other post-soviet members of the Commonwealth of Independent States or between the U.S. and Southern America are the best examples. Historically, the bipolar world model in the times of the Cold War, when the two superpowers were striving to maintain the balance while enlarging their spheres of influence in different parts of the world at the expense of weaker actors is yet another exemplification¹. The U.S. and the USSR were generating asymmetric relations within

¹ For a classic analysis of the problem of *the* spheres of influence after World War II: L.C. Gardner [1999].

their spheres of influence, and when their interests clashed they were ready to commit themselves to the periphery conflicts². In the Russian case, Moscow asymmetrically dominated Central Europe. In the case of the U.S., Washington asymmetrically dominated Latin America (which represented a continuation of the Monroe Doctrine)³. However, what makes them different was the proposition put forward by Franklin Delano Roosevelt to move from *Big Stick Diplomacy* to *Good Neighborhood Policy*. This was the first step of the 20th century power toward a non-confrontational asymmetry between states. It was assumed to give way to more friendly relations, both in terms of politics and economics, between the states of strikingly different international potential [Finnmore, 2003, pp. 17–18].

While analysing asymmetry it is worth defining the criteria allowing to categorise certain types of international relations as asymmetric. These involve the Hard and Soft Power. However, it should be noted that it is impossible to name the asymmetry just on the basis of a straightforward comparison of the Power potentials. The picture would be blurred. For example the global actors like the U.S., the Russian Federation, People's Republic of China and the European Union would have a dictatorship-like advantage over the rest of the world. In reality, however, which one could be defined as regional powers also may have a decisive say in international politics. And even these states do not act alone and try to enter into alliances to improve their own positions. Also the example of the E.U. shows that power could be predominantly of soft character, as the E.U. hard power is limited to economy.

The Power of the State and its Importance in Asymmetric Relations Between the States

There is no universal formula to define the power of a state. First, some elements of hard power could remain idle or even generate problems in terms of the overall power assessment. Second, soft power as a part of the power equation always remains impossible to quantify. However, this does not preclude developing models designed to assess the general power of a state. One of the examples is the Ray Cline formula for measuring national power.

National Power = (population and territory + economic potential of the state + military potential of the state) x (coherent planning, national strategy, society's willpower) [Cline, 1980, p. 211].

² For an analysis of asymmetric conflict: I.A. Toft [2001, pp. 93–128].

³ For an analysis of the Monroe Doctrine: W. Dobrzycki [1996, p. 81].

The formula could be supplemented with the opinion of William Inboden, who pointed out five fundamental characteristics of a state power: material assets, the relational, cumulative and renewable character, being a function of interacting political cultures, which includes the factors such as the type of a government, social trust and morale (not to exclude the influence of religion), and leadership [Inboden, 2009]. One should not forget, that the fluctuations in international relations in the age of globalisation and technological progress enforce the dynamic approach to the power of a state. As Joseph S. Nye has pointed out, there are two fundamental changes taking place: the power is reallocated between the states and it is increasingly dispersed to the benefit of the non-state actors. These changes combined with the dynamics of technological evolution push globalisation forward. However, the political consequences of these changes will be different for nation states and for the non-state actors [Nye, 2012, p. 17].

While analysing the asymmetry in the relations between the U.S. and Taiwan or the U.S. and Poland the disproportions are evident. In terms of human capital, natural resources, military capacity or even geographic situation the American power is beyond discussion.

Table 1. The Comparison of the Most Representative Elements of the American, Taiwanese and Polish Hard Power (as of 2014)

	Territory (km ²)	Population	Army Size	GNP (USD)	GNP (USD) per capita
the U.S.	9 857 306	310 000 000	1 500 000	17.7 x 10 ²¹	48,100
Taiwan	36 000	22 900 000	215 000	529.6 x 10 ⁹	22,637
Poland	312 000	36 200 000	100 000	413.3 x 10 ⁹	15,100

Source: The Author's own elaboration on the basis of: Trading Economics, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/>, World Economic Outlook Database, International Monetary Fund.

Poland's major economic partners include Germany, the Russian Federation and People's Republic of China. The difference in economic potential locates Poland in a far place of the list of the U.S. economic partners. The Polish economy is far less advanced than the American or Taiwanese one, which are both driven by innovations and new technologies. Poland is also at the risk of falling into the middle income trap [Zybertowicz, 2014]. At the same time, the advanced Taiwanese economy helped to establish the Taipei position in the region and in the relations with the U.S., making Taiwan one of the major US economic partners.

As far as the Soft Power is concerned, one of its major elements is the level of education of the society and the correlation between the educational system and the labour market. The other element worth mentioning is the organisation of the society

and the existing social and political system, which closely corresponds with the quality of its management, political elites and of the development strategy of the state.

Table 2. The Comparison of the Most Representative Elements of the Soft Power of the U.S., Taiwan and Poland (Chosen Subjective Elements)

	Political system	Dominating Economic Behavior	Social Model	The most important sectors of the economy and the distribution of employment	Status in International Relations
the U.S.	republic, democracy	Liberal	Liberal society based on multiculturalism, civil rights and freedoms/liberties	Modern technologies, electronics, telecommunication, agricultural machinery, extractive industry; Employment: agriculture 1.2%, industry 19%, services 80%	Global superpower
Taiwan	republic, democracy (since 1990)	State Interventionism	Substantial influence of Confucianism, egalitarian society	Modern technologies, electronics, telecommunication, IT; Employment: agriculture 2%, industry 30%, services 68%	Ambiguous international status
Poland	republic, democracy (since 1989)	Dominance of Private Property with Large State Presence	Liberal society, substantial influence of Christian values	Coal and heavy industry, Agriculture, Employment: agriculture 12.4%, industry 26.2%, services 61.4%	Member of the E.U. and NATO, medium-sized European state

Source: The Author's own elaboration.

In terms of the educational policy Taiwan seems to be doing better than Poland. If one looks at the worldwide university rankings, guides and events, 10 best academies are of American or British origin [QS, 2015]. The Polish universities are ranked in between the 400th and 500th place, while the Taiwanese ones could be found already in the first hundred. For example, the National Taiwan University (NTU) is in the 70th place in the worldwide rankings while the Jagiellonian University is in the 411th place [QS, 2015]. This is a result of a well-designed and implemented educational and economic policy to correlate the educational sector with the demands of the labour market. In the Polish case one can observe a trend to provide education to meet the needs of the foreign markets, which is evidenced in the mass emigration of the young and well-educated generations (2 million emigrants between 2000 and 2015, 1.2 million declared to plan to emigrate just in 2015)⁴. Contrary to the high level of IT proficiency of the Taiwanese society, the Polish one remains on the average Central European level.

⁴ According to the Central Statistical Office of Poland, in 2014 2 million Poles were emigrates, 35% of young Poles (aged 18–24) consider emigration. The major reason is a better salary in the “old” E.U. states. These are also the destination of migration. C. Kowanda [2014].

The rational management of public economy is another interesting issue reflecting the differences in social and economic development strategies. The reforms conducted in Taiwan in the 1950s, based on the American financial and material support, paved the way to develop a modern and innovative economy based on technological advancements. The Polish free-market economy, despite the growing development potential, is still in the phase of catching up with the developed countries. Of course the context of the development of the Polish market and economy are different than the context of the development of the Taiwanese ones. Unlike in Taiwan, after 1945 Poland, as a member of the Eastern Block, had to accept the centrally-planned economy model, with all the disastrous consequences. Following the 1989 transformation period, it was not marked with the American financial or material assistance. However, the outcome of the Polish economic transformation should be perceived in a positive light. The transformation opened up the way to the economy based on small and medium-sized enterprises (similar to the Taiwanese case). However, contrary to the Taiwanese economy, the Polish one is not based on ICT or electronics, and in 2009 in terms of innovation it was placed in the 23rd place within the E.U.⁵.

Diplomatic activity in both cases subject to analysis could be characterised as being regionally concentrated. In case of Taiwan this is a natural consequence of its international status. In case of Poland this is a consequence of the economic challenges and a limited ability to enlarge the sphere of international activity. It should be emphasised that both Taiwan and Poland remain sidelined by their large neighbours. For Poland it is Russia, for Taiwan – continental China. While Poland managed to change its geopolitical situation in 1989 and joined the E.U. and NATO, the situation of Taiwan is far more complex. Taiwan's international status was governed by the bilateral agreement between the U.S. and the PRC (the Shanghai Communiqué, 1972). Its international security is also guaranteed by Washington. While Poland can participate in the proceedings of international organizations, Taiwan, despite its potential, is not even a member of the U.N. All its memberships (under various names in the WTO, APEC, WHO, ICAO) are to a large extent the results of compromises between the major world powers (the PRC and the U.S.). The Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) with China remains highly controversial. As it was signed by the Presidents of the two Foundations: Chiang Pin-kung representing the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and Chen Yun-lin representing the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS), it is hard to call it even international [Tong-chen, 2010, pp. 15–30]. The Taiwan status is described as

⁵ The Polish economy, along with the Hungarian, Greek and Portuguese, is in the third of four official ranking categories of innovation within the E.U.M. Wojtas [2013, p. 608].

non-sovereign territory [TT, 2013]. The Polish regional activity still has to consider Russia as a potential threat to its sovereignty, though⁶.

The asymmetry in the relations between Washington and Warsaw and Washington and Taipei in terms of hard power is obvious. While the U.S. is a superpower of unmatched economic potential, both Poland and Taiwan are to a certain extent dependent on the American policymakers. The geostrategic location of Taiwan is both an important element in the American security infrastructure in East Asia and the Pacific region and an asset in the Taiwanese international politics. The geostrategic location of Poland gained in significance after the collapse of the USSR, in the context of the NATO enlargement. Taiwan is one of the ten most important U.S. trade partners⁷. Poland is in the 19th place as far as U.S. exports are concerned, and in the 11th place as far as U.S. imports are concerned⁸. Thus, in terms of the comparison of power potentials of the three states, despite the obvious U.S. advantage the nature of asymmetry between Poland and the U.S. and Taiwan and the U.S. is substantially different. The Taiwanese economy is an effective supplement of the geostrategic location of the island, while Poland is an important actor only within larger multilateral structures like the E.U. or NATO.

Taiwan and Poland within the American Security System in Asia and Europe

Asymmetry does not have to translate into hegemony or dominance, especially when a broad picture of international relations is taken into account. In the context of the U.S. – Taiwan or the U.S. – Poland relations the asymmetry should be perceived in terms of a superpower guaranteeing the security of a smaller and more vulnerable but important ally. In the Taiwanese case, the Shanghai Communiqué (1972), the Taiwan Relations Act (1979) and the Taiwan Policy Act (2013) [*The text...*, n.d.; MFARP, 1979; FAC, 2013] form an infrastructure of the U.S. security umbrella over the island [Bullard, 2007, p. 284; U.S., 1957, p. 945]. Thus, the Taiwanese presence in the international dimension is a function of great power politics and is an essence of the Taiwan-U.S. asymmetry⁹. In the Polish case, the sovereignty regained after the year 1989 is beyond discussion – it is no longer dependent upon other actors’

⁶ An interesting analogy could be drawn here as Poland’s status after World War II was also to a large extent determined by the agreements between foreign powers.

⁷ Based on U.S. TaiwanConnect [2015].

⁸ Based on the Polish Foreign Ministry [MFARP, 2016].

⁹ On Taiwan international status: L. Antonowicz [1997, p. 42].

international agreements, as it was the case under the Brezhnev Doctrine¹⁰. However, only after joining the NATO and later the E.U. has Poland been able to begin to effectively use its regional potential. If one takes into account that Russia was pressing for the neutrality of Central Europe after the collapse of the USSR, today's Polish geopolitical reality would not come into effect without the alliance with the U.S. pushing for the NATO enlargement in the 1990s. The nature of the asymmetry between the U.S. and Taiwan as well as between the U.S. and Poland is about guaranteeing the sovereignty and national security of the smaller actors. Thus the asymmetry is based on the employment of the American power to secure the existence of Taiwan as a non-sovereign territory and Poland's sovereignty within the NATO structures. In the Taiwanese case the ambiguous legal status is backed up with the political practice or relations in the Taiwan Strait, in the Polish case the reality of the 1990s opened up the way to legally reorganise the Central European political landscape.

Unlike in Europe, in the 20th century Asia the U.S. has not managed to develop a coherent multilateral security infrastructure. The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) turned out to be a fiasco and the American failure in Vietnam has shaken the credibility of Washington in the region. The contemporary U.S. bilateral approach to South East Asia is a function of the historic conditions (the anti-communist containment strategy and the Cold War competition against the USSR) and of existing antagonisms between various regional actors [Gaddis, 2007, pp. 43–81]. Eventually, Washington was able to develop a network of bilateral alliances based mostly on New Zealand, Australia, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea.

In the Taiwan context, after its degradation to “a rebel province”, the U.S. based its politics on the Taiwan Enhancement Security Act, which guaranteed the American military and technological support for the island. There are two major challenges to this strategy. The first one concerns the declaration of full independence by Taiwan itself. This approach, most often associated with Chen Shui-bien's presidency and the Democratic Progressive Party stance during the two terms, risks an open conflict with the PRC¹¹. The declaration of independence would put Washington in a very challenging situation in terms of the relations with Beijing¹². The other one concerns the gradual economic entanglement of Taiwan by the PRC and, finally, its economic and political integration. The American diplomacy has been at bay in regard to Ma Ying-jou and

¹⁰ Introduced after the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. According to the doctrine, the Warsaw Pact intervention was justified in the case of an attempt of secession from the USSR, which would be treated as foreign ideological incursion into the Eastern Block. What is interesting, the doctrine was condemned by some other communist states that did not belong to the Warsaw Pact, for example by the PRC.

¹¹ On Chen Shui-bien approach to the issue of Taiwan independence: H. Chien-chao [2011, pp. 435–439].

¹² On the potential consequences of Taiwan's Independence declaration to the U.S.: CFA [2000].

Kuomintang's practice in that respect [Cheng Lo, 2010]. However, a drift of Taiwan toward the PRC sphere of influence would gradually undermine the U.S. engagement in providing security for the island. The asymmetry would work in favor of Taiwan, as the U.S. would be unable to interfere in the Beijing – Taipei economic integration within the ECFA framework. For the time being the process was stopped by the Sunflower Movement in 2014. The magnitude of challenges makes Taiwan's case a specific one in terms of the American South East Asia Security system. On the one hand the U.S. guarantees the existence of Taiwan, on the other hand the U.S. may fall prey if Taipei develops its own national policy toward the PRC. It is a paradox but from the American perspective maintaining the status quo is the option giving Washington the prospects of stability in the Taiwan Strait.

Unlike in the Asia and Pacific region, the European security is protected by a multilateral alliance – the NATO. After the Cold War, the alliance went through a significant evolution involving not only accepting new members but also reformulating the strategy in 1999 (the Washington Declaration). The redefined goals of the Pact emphasize the complexity of security challenges in the 21st century. These involve the political, economic, social, and even environmental threats to the member states. Thus the NATO evolved from a typical defensive Pact into a political and military organization with a broadening scope of interests involving military assistance missions even outside member states' territories [NATO, 1999]. The first spectacular intervention was conducted in Kosovo (1999), later in Afghanistan (2001, ISAF), Sudan (2005, Darfur) and finally in Libya (2011, Unified Protector). As a full member (since 1999), Poland is protected by the security system of the Pact. However, the membership also involves a number of obligations, according to the strategic goals of the Organization [Polak, Joniak, 2013, pp. 356–370]. The American-Polish cooperation is thus a function of collective responsibility of the NATO member states. Thus, despite the U.S. playing the leading role in the Pact, the Polish national security is guaranteed by the structures of the Pact as a whole.

There is also a question concerning the form and the scale of the American engagement in regional security in the case of Taiwan and Poland.

From the American point of view, Poland is just one of the Pact members. From the Polish perspective, bilateral relations are not less important than multilateral obligations within the Pact, though. For example Poland would be interested in welcoming the American military bases on the Polish soil. The U.S. however, perceives the potential military presence in Poland not only in terms of security (an increase in the manpower does not have to translate into a greater degree of security) but also in terms of the relations with Russia (which always reacts negatively to the deployment of the American troops close to its borders). Thus the form and the scale of the

American engagement in the Polish national security is a function of its obligations within the NATO and its relations with the Russian Federation. In that respect, for Poland the fundamental document outlining the American support is the Declaration of Strategic Cooperation signed in 2008. It is the basis for the Strategic Dialogue between both states. In 2011 it was further supported by the bilateral Memorandum between the Ministry of Defense and the Department of Defense Concerning the Cooperation of the Polish and the U.S. Air Forces in the Territory of Poland. It opened up the way for the rotational deployment of the American F-16 and C-130 planes in the Polish territory. In 2010, during the NATO summit in Lisbon, the Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defense, ALTBMD was accepted as a part of the Pact security infrastructure. This includes a military base in Poland in 2018. Finally, the Russian activity in Ukraine in 2014 positively influenced the Polish-American cooperation in terms of the European security infrastructure. The U.S. did not only declare readiness to protect its European allies, but it also increased its presence and intensity of joint exercises in Poland¹³.

In the case of Taiwan, one cannot speak of hosting the U.S. military. However, on the basis of the Taiwan Relations Act and the Taiwan Policy Act, Taiwan is one of the major recipients of the U.S. military technology. The total size of the American military assistance under the Taiwan Relations Act accounts for 12 bn USD. Joseph Wu comments that the Taiwan Relations Act is of fundamental value to the Taiwanese territorial integrity. He also points out the spheres of the Taiwanese policy where the funds should be allocated: 1. Increasing spending on the Chung-san Institute of Science and Technology to 3% of the budget, with an emphasis on the rocket missile program, 2. Increasing cyber security, especially in the context of the de facto ongoing cyber warfare with the PRC, 3. The development of the submarine fleet, 4. The general development of cooperation with the U.S. [Wu, 2014]. From the American point of view, the bilateral Chinese-American 1982 Communiqué concerning supplying Taiwan with military technology plays an important role in the above context [AIT, 1982]. On their basis the American enterprises may supply Taiwan with weapons on purely commercial terms (direct commercial sales). This allows to bypass the “arms packages” system introduced by the Foreign Military Sales framework [Hu, Kuo, 2010]. The U.S. declared to conduct adjustments in that matter in 2010 – to counteract political repercussions from the PRC.

The political changes taking place in the Chinese Republic (the rise of the DPP and the falling support for the KMT) help the U.S. to become more flexible in terms of Taiwan's national security. In December 2015 the Obama administration declared

¹³ For the official stance of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on that matter: MFARP [2016].

to pave the way for offering Taiwan the last generation military technology worth 1.83 bn USD within the next 4 years [Cameron, 2015]. The U.S. sees that as strengthening the Taiwanese military security and the stabilisation of the situation in the Taiwan Strait [Cohen, 2015]. The PRC reacted immediately by commenting on that decision that it posed a threat to the Chinese interests. The American enterprises that would participate in the project were to be sanctioned by the PRC. The Obama decision suggests a more determined support for the Taiwanese national security. It is also a clear signal from Washington that the U.S. treats Taipei as a major partner in the Asia Pacific region. At the same time Beijing takes retaliatory steps, which will not concern the U.S. as a state, though.

The asymmetry in terms of the U.S. security policy in the Asia Pacific region should be put in the context of the non-existing regional multilateral security system. Instead, the security framework of Asia Pacific is based on bilateral agreements. Taiwan is one of the major American allies. The recent American decisions strengthen its aspirations to remain an autonomous regional actor. In such a context the asymmetry is placed in the bilateral context of relations and is a function of the Taiwanese dependence on the American assertions of the Island's security. In the Polish case the asymmetry is less vivid, as Poland is one of the elements of the multilateral security structure in Europe. However, the threats posed to the security of NATO members' play a crucial role in defining which members depend on the NATO assertion more than others. In this context it should be emphasized that Russia's conflict with Ukraine is just one of many security challenges that the alliance has to face. However, the American approach to Europe's security may indicate that in the future the U.S. may be more inclined to take more security measures within the Polish borders or in its close vicinity, within the NATO structures, though.

The U.S. – the People's Republic of China Relations and the Asymmetry in the U.S. – Taiwan Relations

The American – PRC relations in the context of the Taiwan-US asymmetry must be put in a broader context of the American Asia Pacific policy.

Generally, Obama's administration lacked a clear international relations and national security policy doctrine. While trying to be different from his predecessor, President Obama was reluctant to replace the Bush doctrine with his own doctrinal approach [NYT, 2007]. In practice, Obama's approach lacked a list of priorities turning his declarations of wise and conscious exploitation of the American Power into a re-conceptualisation of the American Foreign Affairs rather than a coherent

new project [Dionne, 2009; Brzeziński, 2010, pp. 16–31]. In consequence, the U.S. was reacting to the Chinese peaceful rise in economics and geopolitics rather than actively formulating its own independent policies toward Beijing [Brzeziński, 2010, p. 27]. In this context one may analyse the American Rebalancing Strategy in Asia. It is based on increasing the military presence in Australia and Singapore, making the American presence in Asia Pacific more flexible as the national defense cuts are introduced, joining the East Asia Summit and promoting Transpacific Partnership as an economic framework for years to come [CRS, 2012, p. 1].

The U.S. slowly evolves from the position of a leader to a stabiliser in Asia Pacific [Hongang, 2014, p. 3]. As Wang Hongang puts it, this is an emanation of its growing weakness and of the shift of the world's political center from the Atlantic toward the Pacific [Hongang, 2014]. If the growing influence of China is added to the equation, the balance of power in the region is increasingly less unilateral. Thus the U.S. is forced to accept Beijing as a partner rather than just another ambitious regional actor [Bergstern, 2008, pp. 57–70]. It is only natural that in such circumstances Beijing expects of Washington a greater understanding for the Chinese ambitions in the region and adjusting the American policies to the Chinese needs. The future economic development of the region should help to further develop interdependencies between the states making the Chinese presence a central element of the Asian prosperity. It is worth emphasising that Beijing perceives its own initiatives as complementary to the existing regional cooperation frameworks such as the APEC, East Asia Summit, Shangri-La dialogue. From Chinese perspective it is beneficial to ensure long-run stability of the region, even despite the growing defensive potential of Peoples' Liberation Army, which may in the far future balance the American presence in East Asia [Heath, 2014].

Thus, if one compares the American approach to Asia Pacific – emphasising values (at least verbally), with the Chinese one emphasising stability (of course according to its own needs), in terms of preserving power one may point out that Beijing is in the position of exploiting the American presence in Asia, while the U.S. is struggling to preserve its earlier regional position [Kaplan, 2010, pp. 22–42]. This concerns especially the American regional involvement as a provider of regional security. At the same time, the regional framework of relations based on multilateralism rather than unilateralism eliminates the problem of the American superiority. This element is crucial for an analysis of the asymmetric relations of the U.S. with its regional partners, including Taiwan.

To a certain extent, Taiwan is of similar importance to the two powers. The proclamation of the Anti-Secession Law in 2005 by the PRC translates into treating Taiwan as a part of internal Chinese affairs. This means opposing any attempts to change the

Island's status with force if necessary [NPC, 2005]. To a large extent this is an emanation of the Chinese regional politics – the acceptance of the status quo, which is also the only realistic and acceptable option for Washington, while the Chinese Power continues to grow¹⁴. The situation begs for the question: what would the American reaction in the case of the alleged Taiwanese proclamation of independence be? While taking into account the fact that the documents regulating the status of Taiwan were declared bypassing the Taiwanese participation (the Chinese Anti-Secession Law and the American Acts governing the relations with Taipei), the signatories would be forced to react. Another question concerns whether the U.S. has the capacity required to defend Taiwan in the case of the Chinese invasion [Schlapak, Orletsky, Reid, 2009, p. XVI]. According to RAND Corporation experts, the question would be reduced to the calculation whether Taiwan is worth the American engagement and the abandoning of conciliatory relationships with the PRC. Another problem may concern the Taipei – Beijing relations under the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement, which pulls Taiwan into the Chinese economic orbit. The U.S. position in terms of Taiwan's status is extremely complex. "Losing" the Island may be interpreted in the whole region as a sign of the growing American weakness. Like in the case of losing the Vietnam war this may result in the degradation of the American credibility in the eyes of its allies.

In a broader context, Taiwan's status is determined by the increasingly symmetric Chinese – American relations. The PRC attempts to develop a reality in which together with the U.S. it may form complementary elements of the same framework, based on a compromise. The compromise would have to involve abandoning some of the American concepts in the Asia Pacific region, including the stance on the Taiwanese geopolitical status. Thus the Chinese ambitions lead to a general acceptance of the Chinese perception of the Taiwanese issue. The American decisions taken in 2015 indicate that this matter is not of secondary importance to Washington, though. It seems that Washington will play the Taiwanese card as one of the central components of the symmetric relations.

The U.S. – Russia Relations and the Asymmetry of the American Relations with Poland

Obviously, the regional Polish potential does not match the global potential of Russia or the U.S. President Putin's policies are based on aspirations to reconstruct

¹⁴ Elaborated in: C.N. Wei [2010, pp. 112–127].

the Russian potential and influence. The traditional sphere of the Russian interests – Central Europe and the Baltic states – was lost due to the collapse of the USSR. Since then, the Russian ambitions have involved the sustaining of dependent buffer states like Ukraine or Belarus. It does not accept any pro-Western ambitions within its close neighbourhood and their potential participation in alliances not of Russian origin are viewed as being of destabilising nature for the Russian political approach. However, as a global power with interests in other parts of the world, for example in the Middle East, in some circumstances the Russian interests may turn out to complement the European ones.

The war in Ukraine has reinvigorated the Polish diplomacy. Warsaw tried to support the sovereign ambitions of Kiev¹⁵. However, Poland is not perceived by Russia as a military or economic threat. The Russian propaganda perfectly exploits the historical issues which are one of the Polish diplomacy weaker points. The false picture of the Russian – Polish history acts as an effective background for the Russian ongoing political actions – presenting Poland as aggressive yet losing political strength and it works well in terms of presenting Russia as the only stabilising force in Eastern Europe. However, the American presence in Poland may mark a significant emanation of the NATO – Russia relations. Traditionally, military presence (in terms of military bases of any kind) close to the Russian borders is perceived by Moscow as an interference in the country's internal affairs and a security threat [TT, 2016].

Deploying even small American forces in Poland drastically complicates the situation. This was proven by the Russian protests against establishing even the American storage bases for heavy military equipment in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Bulgaria and Romania. Russia openly implies that such actions violate the 1997 NATO-Russian agreement under which the alliance confirmed it would not locate military equipment in new member states from Central Europe [NATO, 1997]. As evidence of the good Russian intentions Moscow points out that it peacefully withdrew its military forces from both Central European and Baltic states.

For Poland, the dislocation of the American military support, which in the case of emergency would back up the Polish forces, would be both a boost within the NATO structures and a positive development in terms of national security in the context of the Moscow-Warsaw relations. The November 2015 Polish-U.S. agreement concerning the deployment of the American military equipment in Poland is a marked signal that the U.S., despite exhibiting some reservations, perceives this part of Europe, including Poland, as an important element of its own security system [TG, 2015].

¹⁵ For a thorough analysis of this issue: A. Kowalczyk [2015].

Additionally, the upcoming July 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw will further show a permanent character of the Polish membership in the Alliance¹⁶.

Thus, Poland is just one ring in the chain of a collective defensive Pact. Within this Pact it may strengthen its defensive potential. In that respect, the U.S. military is of central importance, especially in terms of military bases' deployment. However, it should be emphasised that from the American perspective Poland remains in the context of the Russian-related issues. The nature of the American – Polish asymmetry is to a large extent a function of the relations between Moscow and Washington, regardless of more or less insulting Russian politics toward Warsaw. This makes Poland more often an object rather than the subject of the Russian – American political relations. Nevertheless, as Russia is increasingly more and more often perceived as a security threat to the U.S., the American relations with Poland may become increasingly beneficial for Warsaw.

Summary

The non-confrontational asymmetry was analysed on the basis of two different, yet similar cases. The hard and soft power potential of Poland and Taiwan are strikingly different, just as their legal status. However, the dependency on the American ally and the threat posed by a close neighbour make some of their behaviours worth comparing. A seemingly weaker Taiwan – basing on the American support, managed to become an economic powerhouse and to minimise the negative influence of the PRC. Poland – to a certain extent – achieved similar results by joining the E.U. (which marked the enhancement of its economic potential) and NATO (enhancing national security, basing mostly on the American military potential). In both cases, contrary to the common assumptions, the asymmetry has proven to be beneficial to the weaker partners in question. It has also proved to have the potential to constitute a burden for the stronger actor, as the volatile behaviour of weaker partners may negatively impact on the U.S. interests in the geopolitically complex situations.

¹⁶ Presidential elections in US are always of crucial importance for the American foreign policy. However, the signals that are already coming from military circles are disturbing. The nominated Chief of Joint Staff, Joseph Danford, pointed Russia as the major military threat to American national security. He recommended supporting Ukraine as an adequate measure to counter this threat. This has obvious consequences for Poland – as another buffer state between Europe and Russian Federation.

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